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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abdo's office gamble is no 'easy play'

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In the past four years, 14th Street NW has emerged as a prime stretch of restaurants, home-goods stores and high-priced condos without losing its funky charm.

Much of the credit belongs to developer Jim Abdo, who's been in the neighborhood since the redevelopment began.

Now Abdo wants to add a new ingredient to the stew: Office space.

The developer, who built his company on renovating historic houses in scruffy neighborhoods, is seeking approval from the city's Historic Preservation Review Board to build a 30,000-square-foot-office building on the northwest corner of 14th and Rhode Island Avenue, above the Caribou Coffee which rents space from him on street level.

"This office building is a completely different dimension, Abdo says. "It balances out the neighborhood."

The building would be the first office development built along 14th Street NW in decades; downtown's office buildings stop at the southern edge of Thomas Circle. Mean-while, developers are building hundreds of condos along 14th Street, well past U Street and through Columbia Heights.

Abdo's office would stand about 75 feet. Tenants such as law offices, e-commerce and graphic design firms would be targeted to rent space by the floor. Each floor would range between 3,000 and 5,000 square feet. Abdo says the space should appeal to people who already live in the neighborhood or frequent the shops and restaurants. An office building would bring the neighborhood more daytime



FILE PHOTO BY JOANNE S. LAWTON / STAFF

An office building on 14th Street's is 'a completely different dimension,' says developer Jim Abdo. He chalks yet another condo development up as an 'easy play.'

activity. His own offices (www.abdo.com) are on the second floor of a building on the same block

The preservation review board denied Abdo's initial proposal, but the developer says recent design changes should satisfy the board. Abdo is expected to present his plan to the review board late next month.

Tersh Boasberg, chairman of the review board, could not be reached for comment. Ellen McCarthy, who serves as deputy director for the city's planning department, also could not be reached for comment.

The proposed building would not be built on top of a historic structure, but the project requires approval from the review board because the building would be built

in an historic district.

Sherri Kimbel, vice president of the Logan Circle Community Association, says the neighborhood group has not yet taken a formal position on the revised proposal. The Advisory Neighborhood Commission that represents the area is scheduled to take up the issue May 26.

Abdo admits he's not sure an office building will work, but he is willing to take the risk to infuse some daytime activity into the area.

Building condos would be an "easy play," Abdo says. "People would be buying those from us all day long"

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